

**HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM QUALITY REVIEW
GEORGETOWN COUNTY DSS
OCTOBER 2001**

The South Carolina Department of Social Services Human Services Division conducted a qualitative review of Georgetown County DSS in Fall 2001.

The review was conducted on site, and consisted of case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews. In this review, the external stakeholders interviewed were foster parents, Mental Health, Juvenile Justice, Georgetown Guardian ad Litem, DAODAS, and the Foster Care Review Board.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SAMPLE INFORMATION

Program under review	Referrals Not Accepted As CPS Reports	CPS Investigation	CPS Treat. - Active	CPS Treat. - Closed	Foster Care - Active	Foster Care - Closed	Foster Home Licensing
Period Under Review	6/01/01 - 8/31/01	4/01/01 - 6/30/01	8/31/01	6/01/01- 8/31/01	8/31/01	6/01/01 - 8/31/01	8/31/01
Case Population for Period Under Review	12	48	26	3	24	7	8
Cases Sampled	12	20	20	3	20	7	8
Cases Reviewed	12	20	18	3	19	7	8

This report is in 3 major sections: the Review Summary by Critical Decision Points, the General Findings section outlining strengths and issues which may require action, and the Measures and Outputs section which applies the review findings to the Agency's Child Welfare Outcomes.

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REVIEW SUMMARY BY CRITICAL DECISION POINTS**

Intake:

In our review of intake files, we found that decisions whether to accept or not accept referrals as CPS reports were generally appropriate. The intake documentation on file addressed probe interviewing by the intake worker and proper and consistent consideration by both the worker and supervisor of the allegations to determine whether or not to investigate.

Investigation:

Based on case review and staff interviews, the county usually responded with successful initial contacts quickly. In investigations initiated in March and early April 2001, we found in general that most investigative activity took place within the first 10 days to 2 weeks of the investigation. There were usually no followup contacts recorded to update the case circumstances when the case decision staffing was held. Documentation of investigative activities were usually brief and incomplete. Collateral contacts were generally not documented, although staff when interviewed stated that some collateral contacts were made. Family contacts were brief and not all appropriate family members were contacted.

We noted the county was not effective in ensuring that Safety Plans were developed in instances where children were not removed. This was evident particularly in cases involving domestic violence. Based on the limited documentation available, the safety and risk were generally assessed for all children in the home at the initial contact.

Investigations initiated after early April 2001 exhibited thorough documentation of investigations with ongoing client and collateral contacts during the investigation. Assessments of safety and risks were more completely documented as well.

Case Decision:

In the majority of investigations reviewed, supervisory review and guidance in the decision making process was well documented in case records and stated in staff interviews as a positive factor in their work. Case decisions were generally supported by the evidence documented in the case files, although information in the computer system was inaccurate or incomplete when documenting unfounded case decisions.

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The county was not effective in making efforts to notify the parties involved in the investigation of the case decision. The notification of the case decision did not clearly explain the factors and actions determining the case decision. Since this is the only document received by the family and/or the alleged perpetrator, the notification should be considered as a “stand alone” document.

Case Transfer/Transition to Treatment and Foster Care:

Georgetown DSS has a formal process of transferring cases from Investigations to the Treatment and Foster Care Units. Based on staff interviews and case record documentation, the initial contacts with clients and families by CPS Treatment and Foster Care staff usually occurred within 2 weeks of the transfer staffing.

CPS (In-Home) Treatment/ Foster Care (Out-of-Home):

Assessment and Treatment Planning:

Foster Care:

Based on the documents reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for those Foster Care cases where it was appropriate for the parents and children to be involved in the development of case plans usually did not have significant input and involvement from the family or affected service providers. Placement Plans generally described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior. For children in foster care with a permanent plan of Independent Living, the Placement Plan provided specific description of what skills were needed to prepare the child for transition from foster care, how those skills were to be acquired, and by when. Placement Plans for children in foster care specifically addressed the medical, educational, or social needs for the individual child.

CPS Treatment:

Based on the documents reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for CPS Treatment cases usually had significant input and involvement from the family or affected service providers. The Treatment Plans addressed domestic violence issues where applicable, and described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior.

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Service Delivery:

Foster Care:

Based on case review, we found that the county was effective in transferring cases from Investigations to Foster Care. Initial contacts with families and children were made within 2 weeks of placement, and the actual initiation of services after placement generally took less than 1 month.

Regular face-to-face contacts with clients and service providers were documented for both CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases along with extensive telephone contacts. The ongoing assessment of safety of the child(ren) either in home or in care was clearly documented, with the exception of CPS Treatment cases involving domestic violence issues. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was usually complete and descriptive.

Based on the Foster Care cases reviewed, children in care experienced between 0 and 3 placement changes on average. The reason for placement changes was generally documented clearly, with the primary reason focussing on placing siblings together.

Interaction between the Agency and the Foster Care Review Board was documented on the computer system and in case files, and copies of the findings from those hearings were on file. Georgetown Foster Parents surveyed indicated they were notified of upcoming FCRB hearings and provided the Progress Report required if they could not attend FCRB.

CPS Treatment:

Regular face-to-face contacts with clients and service providers were documented for CPS Treatment cases along with extensive telephone contacts. The ongoing assessment of safety of the child(ren) in home was clearly documented. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was usually complete and descriptive.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of ongoing cases tended to focus on progress toward goal achievement via changes in behavior and/or circumstances. Supervisory involvement and guidance in CPS Treatment cases was extensive. Supervisory involvement and guidance in Foster Care cases was more limited and documentation generally indicated that supervisory review of actions or plans took place after the action instead of prior to the action.

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Closure:

CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases which were closed had limited documentation of staffing or case evaluation activity which supported the decision to close.

Court Activity Foster Care (Out-of-Home):

Interviews with the Administrative Family Court Judge, Foster Care Review Board, Georgetown Guardian ad Litem and DSS staff were conducted. DSS attorneys and caseworkers were considered well-prepared for court. The County office holds pre-trial conferences regularly between agency attorneys and caseworkers, and the content of those conferences is currently sufficient to ensure that the Court can expect caseworkers to be consistently well-prepared to testify. We noted the Agency was generally in compliance with court orders in the cases reviewed.

Foster Home Licensing:

Recruitment Plan:

At the time of the review, we had not been provided with a plan of foster home recruitment.

Initial Licenses:

There were no Foster Homes in their first year of licensure in Georgetown County and therefore no initial licenses available for review.

License Renewal:

Renewal of Foster Home Licenses were generally completed prior to the expiration of the previous license. We did note 2 licenses which expired prior to issuance of a renewal with gaps ranging from 4 to 9 days in unlicensed status. We also noted 2 expired licenses which had not been renewed. Based on file documentation and staff interviews, there was usually consultation with the foster care caseworker at the time of renewal to evaluate the care received by children placed at a particular foster home. In our file review, we noted that Sexual Offender Registry checks were completed for all family members. The discussion of age ranges or behaviors acceptable to the Foster Parent for placement in their homes and corporal punishment policies was not generally documented in the licensing files.

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Ongoing Activities:

Based on documentation in the licensing files, staff interviews, and Foster Parent contacts, regular quarterly contacts are taking place, and the nature and content of the contacts focussed not issues related to foster parenting or licensure.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The findings below affect the quality of the casework and service delivery either directly or indirectly. They are based on staff interviews, stakeholder interviews, client interviews, case records, computer system review, and review of the county outcome and performance analysis document.

STRENGTHS OF GEORGETOWN COUNTY DSS.

1. Georgetown DSS management staff have developed a system of meetings and briefings to ensure regular opportunities for discussion of case situations, supervisory input and guidance, and mutual decision making. In the 6 months prior to this review in particular, the overall quality of supervisory involvement and guidance has improved.
2. External stakeholders view the Georgetown DSS Director and staff as a positive force in improving service delivery in the community.
3. Georgetown DSS is responsive in initiating investigations quickly and making initial contacts with children in Foster Care and families in CPS Treatment cases.
4. Georgetown DSS has a close and cooperative working relationship with the Family Court, and the other service agencies in the community.
5. The majority of children in the foster care cases reviewed were on appropriate grade level, and were experiencing few problems with behavior, substance abuse, or school attendance. The children who were identified as having adjustment problems were receiving

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counseling.

6. CPS Treatment Plans and Foster Care Placement Plans were generally well-written and specific. For children in foster care with a permanent plan of Independent Living, the Placement Plan provided specific description of what skills were needed to prepare the child for transition from foster care, how those skills were to be acquired, and by when.

ISSUES REQUIRING POSSIBLE ACTION IN GEORGETOWN COUNTY DSS:

1. Safety Planning for Investigations and CPS Treatment case involving domestic violence issues was not clear in specifically addressing how the safety of the children in those homes was addressed on an ongoing basis.
2. Although Placement Plans were generally well-written and specific for Foster Care cases, parents and where appropriate children were not directly involved in the development of their case plan. Because of this, there were cases where the permanent plan for the child was not realistic or appropriate based on the conditions of the family and lack of involvement by the family.
3. When caseworkers were interviewed and asked about specific cases, they were generally able to describe ongoing activities and contacts which were not documented. Lack of time was the common reason given for delays in documenting or not documenting activities fully. Several staff work after hours to complete documentation.
4. Foster Care closures were not generally staffed with supervisors or planned with service providers or with clients.
5. Children in care in the cases we reviewed experienced from 0 to 5 changes in placements, with most having 0 to 3 placements. We found no correlation of number of placements with either time in care or the age of the child in care.
6. The county needs to insure that Foster Home Licenses are renewed

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prior to expiration. Children placed in unlicensed homes are at risk of losing their Title IV-E eligibility and therefore their medicaid benefits. Also the agency could be subject to legal risk during the unlicensed period.

Overall, Georgetown DSS is faced with issues of follow through and direction, primarily in the Foster Care program, which can potentially impede the successful achievement of or progress toward the Child Welfare Outcomes promulgated by the Agency. However, the Agency has developed an operational framework of meetings, staffings, and conferences which provide opportunities to resolve these issues.

Throughout the review, we noted discrepancies between documentation in the hard copy case file and SACWIS, the DSS computer system in use in the period prior to this review. This raises a question as to the accuracy of the systems information provided in the Measures and Outputs section of this report. Staff who were interviewed reported activities which were not documented, which raises an issue of the effectiveness of current documentation practices.

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MEASURES AND OUTPUTS**

Outcome 1: Increase permanency for children in Foster Care (Safe and Stable Home for Every Child)

Measure	Source	County		State	
		#	%	#	%
Total Children in Care	SACWIS	32	100%	4862	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	SACWIS	16	50.00%	3052	62.77%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	SACWIS	8	50.00%	1044	34.21%
Children in care for whom permanency plan has not been achieved within 3/6 months after permanency planning hearing	SACWIS	Report under development			

Summary: While data is not readily available concerning the achievement of permanency plans, the lack of involvement of the family or the child in planning is a major factor which can adversely affect this outcome.

Georgetown DSS has the structure in place which has the potential to enable achievement of this outcome, after case permanency planning and client participation are addressed.

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Outcome 2: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption

Measure	County		State	
	#	Months	#	Months
Average number of months in foster care until adoption is final	0	N/A	469	46.40
Average number of days/months in foster care after permanency planning hearing approves a plan of TPR or adoption for the child	Report under development			
Average number of days/months in foster care after TPR is granted	Report under development			

Summary: Not applicable in this county.

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Outcome 3: Improve Child Well-Being

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and adolescents attending school and performing: passing grades, maintaining grade level, school readiness (1 st), truancy, suspensions/expulsions, literacy, diploma/GED, secondary education	In the 13 cases reviewed where Foster Children were in school, we found that 8 (61.54%) were on grade level, and 11 cases (84.62%) were attending school and exhibiting no attendance or behavior problems. The cases with attendance or behavior problems was receiving support services.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	In the 15 cases reviewed, we found that the 6 children identified with mental health or adjustment issues were actively receiving therapy or counseling.			
Number and percentage of children with substance abuse are stable or improving	In the 15 cases reviewed, we found that no children were identified with substance abuse issues.			
Number and percentage of runaways	0	0.00%	95	1.95%
Number and percentage who age out of foster care and failed to meet goals	Report under development			
Number and percentage who become pregnant	From case file review and caseworker interviews, we noted no instances of pregnancy or of a foster child fathering a child.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	In the 16 cases reviewed, we found that 4(25.00%) children were involved with delinquency issues.			

Summary: Based on case reviews, children in foster care in Georgetown are generally experiencing few problems with school, behavior, or substance abuse. The Independent Living cases reviewed documented realistic case plans to prepare the child for leaving foster care.

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**Outcome 4: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without
Increasing Re-entry**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children who show physical and mental health stability and/or improvement	Based on our review of 19 Foster Care cases and caseworker interviews, all children were either receiving counseling or in a supportive placement which stabilized any physical or mental health conditions.			
Number and percentage of parents with substance abuse who are stable and/or improving	Report under development			
Average number of family/relative visits per child per month (parents, other relatives)	In the 9 Foster Care cases where visitation was a part of the case plan, we noted an average of 2 visits per child per month from family or relatives.			
Number of children who return to foster care after reunification within 12 months	3	7.89%	201	8.72%

Summary: Our case review indicated that visitation occurred on a regular and planned basis. In those instances where visitation did not occur as planned, there was documented followup with the parent or relative to address the need for visitation or reasons for not attending.

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Outcome 5: Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions (Federal Requirements)

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children age 12 years and below placed in group homes or institutions	2	0.74%	272	100%

Summary: Georgetown DSS is taking the age of the child into consideration when arranging placements, by considering the availability of individual foster homes first. The lack of available spaces in individual foster homes occasionally precludes placement of siblings together unless in a group home or institution.

Outcome 6: Reduce/Prevent Abuse of Children in Foster Care

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of children in foster care with substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff person	2	2.04%	98	100%

Summary: Georgetown DSS has regular telephone or face-to-face contacts with foster parents by foster home licensing staff. All foster parents are seen at these contacts, and the topics discussed are usually related to foster parenting issues. We noted visits with foster children are clearly documenting an ongoing assessment of the child's safety.

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Outcome 7: Increase Stability of Placements and Other Aspects of Foster Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children in foster care with more than two placements	14	43.75%	2690	55.53%

Summary: The majority of cases we reviewed had between 0 and 3 placements. In those cases with higher numbers of placements, the reason for changing placements was documented clearly in the record. The primary reason for placement changes was to arrange placement of siblings in an individual home.

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/schools systems:	Of the 13 children in Foster Care who are attending school:			
Once	3 (23.08%) had changed school once as the result of placement			
More than once	None had changed school more than once as the result of placements.			
Percentage of cases with more than one change in foster care case workers	Of the 19 cases reviewed, 5 (26.32%) had more than one change in foster care caseworkers.			

Summary: The documentation in the files reviewed did not directly address changes in schools or school districts, but review staff were able to determine from dictation those changes in schools that were recorded. We noted that placements, and by extension, school placements were very stable for most children in foster care in Georgetown County.

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Outcome 9: Reduce/Prevent Abuse and Neglect of Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect:	6	66.00%	293	46.00%
Total				
Among high-risk populations	Report under development			
Number of fatalities among children known to the agency	Reported Elsewhere			

Summary: Georgetown DSS has regular staffing procedures in place to address effective case decision-making. Investigations initiated after early April 2001 exhibited thorough documentation of investigations with ongoing client and collateral contacts during the investigation. Assessments of safety and risks were more completely documented as well.

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Outcome 10: Reduce/Prevent Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of the 1 st indicated report	Report under development			
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of reunification	Report under development			

Summary: We noted that most cases reviewed had prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referral. The general finding of limited client involvement in Foster Care case planning and case closure, and limited supervisory involvement are significant factors which can adversely affect this outcome.

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**Outcome 11: Limit the Number of Abused and/or Neglected Children
Entering Foster Care to Those Who are Truly Endangered in
Their Home**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children court ordered into placement	0	32.00%	1131	23.26%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	4	12.50%	269	5.53%
Number and percentage of treatment cases closed with risk reduced and treatment goals achieved (i.e. parents' and children's physical/mental health and safety improved)	0	0.00%	360	7.24%

Summary: The limited involvement of clients and service providers in the closure decision, especially with CPS Treatment, calls into question the validity of the numbers above. Discrepancies and delays in systems updates also is a factor in questioning these figures.

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Outcome 12: Minimize Intrusion upon the Lives of Families and Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and families, when asked, indicate/feel that the agency intruded in their lives:	In the client interviews conducted, all interviewees felt the involvement of the agency was an intrusion into their lives.			
Where services are provided (community based)	Interviews and case record reviews indicated the provision of services in the community and as near to the client as available.			
How we deliver services (mutual planning)	In client interviews and in case record reviews, mutual planning was occurring.			
When services are provided (convenient hours)	Most interviews reported that it was possible to arrange convenient times for service to be provided.			
How clients were treated (respect and dignity)	CPS Treatment clients interviewed reported that they were involved in planning.			
Number of days/weeks from achievement of treatment goals to case closure in treatment cases	Report under development			

Summary: There are regular staffings with other agencies, and the exchange of progress reports is clearly documented. The limited involvement of clients and service providers in Foster Care case planning can be barriers to the achievement of this outcome.

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Outcome 13: Increase Supply of Foster Home Placement Slots

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of licensed foster home placement slots	26	100%	1695	100%
Kinship care	Report under development			
Placements that fit	Report under development			
Close to home	Report under development			

Summary: Georgetown DSS has procedures in place to improve support to foster parents and to determine appropriate placements for children. However, there is not a plan for recruitment of new foster homes.

Outcome 14: Increase Number of Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions finalized	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)

Outcome 15: Reduce Number of Disrupted Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions disrupted within 12 months of finalization	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)